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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA AND NEA/IPA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [SCUL](#) [UNESCO](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#) [JO](#)  
SUBJECT: JORDAN MAINTAINS STRIDENT POSITION ON MUGHRABI GATE

REF: A. AMMAN 3080  
[1](#)B. AMMAN 2965  
[1](#)C. TEL AVIV 2043  
[1](#)D. AMMAN 2483  
[1](#)E. AMMAN 2453  
[1](#)F. AMMAN 2147  
[1](#)G. AMMAN 1998  
[1](#)H. AMMAN 1483  
[1](#)I. AMMAN 536  
[1](#)J. AMMAN 394  
[1](#)K. TEL AVIV 2589

Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In response to the Ambassador's questions about the ongoing Jordanian-Israeli dispute over work on the Mughrabi Gate ascent to the Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif, the King tasked a formal white paper laying out Jordan's position on the issue. The paper underscores Jordan's position that: Jordan wants to implement its own design; the U.S. must play a role in resolving the dispute; if the matter is not resolved, Jordan will not hesitate to use all the political and legal tools available, even if it undermines "the important work achieved in the past." By continuing to up the ante the King may be leaving himself less room to walk back from an all-or-nothing position. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Ambassador met on December 4 with King Abdullah and inquired about Jordan's next steps on the controversial ascent issue, particularly if a resolution satisfactory to Jordan was not reached. The King reiterated previous comments he and others have made about the issue's importance to his legitimacy and for local and regional stability (Refs A-J) and tasked Royal Court Chief Nasser Al-Lozi with preparing a formal position paper answering the Ambassador's question. On December 18, the Ambassador met with Lozi, who offered the appended white paper - and treated it as a Jordanian initiative.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Text of the white paper is as follows:

Talking Points for meeting with US Ambassador on the  
Magharbeh Ascent in Jerusalem

December 18, 2008

(1) I have asked to meet with you today to transmit a direct message from His Majesty to the US administration on where Jordan stands on the Magharbeh Ascent.

(2) The Haram is a red line Jordan will under no circumstances be silent (about) or stand idle as efforts to expand and consolidate the Israeli hold on the Holy Basin accelerate and threaten both the legitimacy of the Hashemite Kingdom, the Monarchy's credibility and standing, as well as

the stability of Jerusalem and the two-state solution, which are key to Jordan's national security.

(3) The Magharbeh Ascent is an inseparable part of the Haram and any action taken on that Ascent directly infringes and impacts the Haram. This is an entrance to the Haram and any transformations will affect the surface area, underlying bed, as well as the walls of the Haram.

(4) The Israeli design will have an extremely dangerous impact on the Haram by allowing APCs to move into the Haram, as well as hundreds of people within a short period of time, in addition to changing the status of the area beneath the ascent and expanding Israeli prayer sites and excavations at the expense of Muslim archeological sites.

(5) Jordan has prepared a design that has been looked on favorably by UNESCO experts to reconstruct the Ascent in line with its original state. Israel refuses to allow Jordanian experts to undertake on-site measures to finalize its design, which will be submitted to UNESCO.

(6) Jordan would like to be responsible for the design and implementation of the Magharbeh Ascent as part of its historic and legal responsibilities on Muslim Holy Sites (in accordance with the Jordan Israel Peace Treaty as well).

(7) Israel insists that the only design can be its own and under its own implementation. It is only willing to listen to Jordanian comments on its own design. Jordan cannot accept to be used as a rubber stamp to legitimize an Israeli design and sign on to (an) Israeli role on the Muslim Holy site.

(8) Recognizing or accepting Israeli plans will set a precedent endorsing an Israeli role and undermining Jordan's historic and legal role. We cannot accept that.

(9) Complacency to Israel's plans will lead to the erosion of Jordan's role and responsibility. The vacuum will be filled up by radicals and extremist elements and others in the region using the sacred Muslim sites as the key weapon fueling a religious war.

(10) Israel is already changing the character of Jerusalem by transforming full Arab neighborhoods to Jewish areas. Implementation of the Israeli plans on the Magharbeh Ascent will lead to a violent eruption in Jerusalem and transform the political conflict into an intractable religious war - with grave regional and global ramifications.

(11) This is a matter of grave concern for His Majesty personally and Jordan will save no effort to counter Israel's plans and will not hesitate to use all the political and legal tools and measure available.

(12) The US role is key in preventing us from having to make difficult decisions and reach a situation forced upon us by Israel's plans. The key to this is with Israel and we hope that the US Administration will give this issue its most serious consideration.

(13) His Majesty had raised this personally with the Secretary of State in Aqaba seeking US support. Israel continues to refuse to engage on the Jordanian design for the Ascent.

(14) It will not be in the interest of Jordan, the US or Israel to allow this situation to turn into a major crisis. We hope we will not be forced to take measures that may undermine the important work achieved in the past.

End Text of White Paper.

Comment: Is Jordan Reaching the End of Its Rope?

14. (C) While the white paper largely repeats positions we

have been hearing for some time and does not remove ambiguity regarding Jordan's ultimate plans, we note the following significant points:

- Although there are some in the GOJ (Foreign Minister Salah Al-Bashir, for instance) who have hinted - albeit without detail - that a compromise might be possible short of Jordan's ideal, none of that spirit of compromise is evident in this paper, written on directive from the King. The text is as strident and emotion-laden as anything we have heard orally.

- Jordan explicitly acknowledges possible negative consequences that could "undermine the important work achieved in the past" if Jordan takes unspecified strong "political and legal measures" in response to an outcome not to its liking. However, the paper argues, Jordan would have no choice.

- While we have urged Jordan to focus its efforts on seeking a bilateral solution directly with Israel, the paper places an onus on the U.S. to help resolve the situation before it reaches true crisis proportions.

- The paper puts in ink accusations that Israel's design is meant to facilitate the movement of armored personnel carriers onto the Haram Al-Sharif. (Note: A Jordanian official had previously cited media reports of this claim to illustrate a point about the level of distrust, but that official had also expressed doubts that this was Israel's plan (Ref F). Interestingly, the Israeli position as articulated in Ref K appears to be that the new ascent must be built soon so that its police forces - albeit with no mention of APCs - have ready access to the Haram to ensure law and order. End Note.)

¶5. (C) We do not pretend to be able to precisely divine Jordanian intent if they get no satisfaction on the Mughrabi Gate issue, and they seem disinclined to tip their hand. However, by continuing to up the ante the King may be leaving himself less room to walk back from an all-or-nothing position. Other elements influencing the Jordanian strategy on the Mughrabi Gate issue are the public's extreme anger over the situation in Gaza, concerns that a Likud-led government in Israel may be in the offing, fear of rudderless Palestinian polity after the expiry of Mahmoud Abbas's tenure on January 9, renewed (and popular) talks with Hamas, and significant strides toward easing strained relations between the GOJ and the indigenous Islamic Action Front. The instinct to "do something" in the face of perceived Israeli intransigence on an issue where Jordan has such a special interest could prevail over cooler heads.

¶6. (C) Jordan seems unlikely to halt its close (but quiet) security cooperation with Israel, but withdrawing its Ambassador seems neither beyond the pale nor unprecedented: From November 2000 until 2005, Jordan did not fill the Ambassadorial vacancy in Tel Aviv in protest of Israel's actions during the second Intifada sparked when Ariel Sharon visited the Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount in late September ¶2000. In a meeting with the Foreign Minister on December 25, Ambassador noted that the white paper remained ambiguous about Jordan's plans and asked Bashir pointedly whether steps could include withdrawal of the Ambassador or court action. Bashir simply responded "all of the above." End Comment.

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